

**“On The Front Lines of the Border Crisis: A Hearing with Chief Patrol Agents”**  
**Committee on Oversight and Accountability**  
**10:00 AM, Tuesday, February 7, 2023**  
**Statement for the Record**  
**Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

In the 2022 midterms, Republicans campaigned on inflation, crime, and the border. Since taking control of the majority in the House of Representatives, Republicans have accomplished just the opposite:

- Instead of addressing inflation, Republicans have proposed legislation to dismantle the groundbreaking Inflation Reduction Act, which lowered costs for working families.
- Instead of addressing crime, Republicans elected an internationally wanted criminal to New York’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District.
- Instead of providing real solutions to handle irregular flows of migration, Republicans have introduced legislation inevitably ending access to asylum at all U.S. borders, even for children.

The Chairs of the Oversight and Judiciary Committees are engaging in a jurisdictional turf war and clamoring to be first to blame the Biden Administration for problems exacerbated by the Trump Administration. We will not forget the cruel moral failures of the Trump Administration that created a shameful “zero tolerance” policy which intentionally separated children from their families. For Republicans, the cruelty was the point. In contrast, within his first two weeks in office, President Biden established a Family Reunification Task Force to restore families that were unjustly separated at the U.S.-Mexico border. Because of President Biden’s work to reconnect families, to date, nearly 1,000 children have yet to be reunited with their families and Democratic policies have mollified some of the irreparable harm caused by the Trump Administration.

How can we trust Republican priorities on the border and immigration? Remember the maniacal focus of the Trump Administration on building a “big, beautiful wall.” They shut the government down over it. They raided funding from the Treasury Department’s drug forfeiture fund, the Department of Defense’s drug interdiction program, the Department of Defense’s military construction account, and even, Homeland Security’s general Customs and Border Protection budget to the tune of \$15 billion.

Republicans will continue to blame vulnerable migrants fleeing violence, hunger, and natural disasters for illicit drug smuggling, but facts are stubborn things. Over 90 percent of fentanyl, and over 80 percent of total illegal narcotics, arrive at legal points of entry—not between them—and are smuggled largely by Americans—not unauthorized migrants. In December 2022, CBP seized 4,500 pounds of fentanyl, the largest amount ever recorded.<sup>1</sup> Incredibly, just five of those 4,500 pounds were seized at the border by U.S. Border Patrol. Republicans are focused on 1% of the problem, 100% of the time. I have been proud to author an

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/NickMiroff/status/1620874604335210496>

annual appropriations letter supporting funding for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program housed at the Drug Enforcement Administration to fund our anti-narcotics activity where it is needed. An estimated 105,752 Americans, a number which included 2,656 Virginians, died from drug overdoses in 2021, and less than one out of 10 people in the United States who need addiction care get it.<sup>23</sup>

Study after study has shown that undocumented immigrants are actually less likely to commit crimes than a U.S. citizen. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Alternatives to Detention Program provides a strong example: The latest data from ICE released on February 3, 2023, demonstrated 99.4% of immigrants monitored on ICE's Alternatives to Detention Program attended their court hearings compared to the .6% which failed to attend their hearing. Not all undocumented immigrants are tracked through this program, but immigrants, when paroled into the United States, overwhelmingly are lawful individuals that attend their court hearings.<sup>4</sup> An American Immigration Council report found that over the past 11 years, an overwhelming 83% of immigrants attended their immigration court hearings, and those who failed to appear in court often did not receive notice or faced hardship in getting to court.<sup>5</sup> Republicans who assert the Biden Administration is releasing countless dangerous migrants into the country are not only trafficking in xenophobic, anti-immigrant sentiment, but they are also peddling lies that are categorically false.

It was former President Trump who cut funding to Central American countries in 2019 as he splurged on an ineffective, costly wall. It was the Trump Administration that tightened sanctions on Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, exacerbating economic mismanagement and subsequent macroeconomic crises that have forced hundreds of thousands to flee and arrive at the southern border. When they pulled the rug out from various, essential assistance programs, they made the problem worse. Upon narrowly winning the majority in the House of Representatives, Majority Leader Steve Scalise put out a list of bills identifying the priorities for the Republican Conference in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. At no point on this list did the words "comprehensive immigration reform" appear. What they have offered is legislation that would codify the denial of the universal human right to seek asylum. No one chooses to become a refugee. No one risks their lives to leave their country of birth and transverse the dangerous Darién Gap.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/16/health/overdose-deaths-record-high-fentanyl/index.html#:~:text=US%20drug%20overdose%20deaths%20reach%20another%20record%20high%20as%20deaths%20from%20fentanyl%20surge,-By%20Deirdre%20McPhillips&text=Annual%20drug%20overdose%20deaths%20have,opioids%20surge%20to%20unprecedented%20levels>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/05/19/biden-administration-announces-15-billion-funding-opportunity-state-opioid-response-grant-program.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9CA%20this%20time%2C%20less%20than,drug%20trafficking%2C%E2%80%9Dsaidsaid%20Dr>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/ackocher/status/1622030499555287041>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/measuring-absentia-removal-immigration-court>

One might remember that in 2013, House Republicans thwarted comprehensive immigration reform from even being introduced after an agreement was reached in the Senate. Many of those same House Republicans, who prevented that legislation from passing the House, are now intent on blaming irregular migration, an issue our country has dealt with for over a century, on the Biden Administration. The situation at the border demands serious policy solutions that provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, address the root causes of migration like repression, political instability, violence, hunger, and lack of economic opportunity and fix our own, broken immigration system.